Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter

'Open your parachute/open your mind'

In this morning's homily, I will be touching on a rather eclectic but interconnected range of themes from Albert Einstein and Frank Zappa to parachuting and resurrection (but not necessarily in that order).

Back in my 20s and 30s when I was a somewhat crazier than I am today (but not that much!), I did a few parachute jumps; which was certainly an exhilarating and adrenaline-fueled experience. Like other extreme sports, parachuting forces participants to face their fears head on. In this case, I had to have complete faith that the round or rectangular sheet of nylon on my back would open, unfurl and then support my weight as I jumped from a perfectly serviceable aircraft and plummet at 120 miles per hour towards the ground. This was sometimes easier said than done! I remember the look of fear and horror on the face of a friend as he sat on the edge of the open door waiting for his turn to jump for the first time. When the time came, he froze but was then unceremoniously pushed by the jumpmaster out of the aircraft. His parachute quickly opened and he landed with a smile on his face and amazingly wanted to do it all again!

It was the American musician Frank Zappa who once said: 'A mind is like a parachute. It doesn't work if it is not open.' I wonder whether <u>your</u> mind is open or closed? Are you open to possibilities, to embracing new ways of thinking, new ideas and concepts? Are you also willing to have some of your pre-conceived ideas challenged? It's very easy for us to think that we are open-minded when in fact they are tightly closed. An advert appeared on my FB timeline yesterday for a t-shirt bearing the words: 'I may be wrong but it's highly unlikely' Does that apply to you?

Life is constantly changing and as a consequence events occur that challenge our thinking. The current Coronavirus pandemic is one such event that is forcing many of us to re-think many things that we had previously taken for granted.

In today's Gospel narrative, Jesus' disciples found themselves in a similar situation to many of us – they too were in a form of lockdown. We read that it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples were meeting were locked for fear of the Jews. (20:19).

For the last three or so years they had been disciples of Jesus of Nazareth; they had left everything to follow him. They had seen him perform great miracles and he had changed their thinking and indeed their lives. Now everything had crumbled, he had been arrested, tried and executed. Everything their hopes and dreams were in shatters. They were now outlaws and heretics in the eyes of the Jewish religious establishment and now feared for their own lives.

It was then that Jesus chose to come and stand in their midst and said 'Peace be with you". Jesus showed them the physical marks in his hands and his side to prove beyond doubt that it was indeed their friend and master, Jesus. Their reaction was not surprisingly joyful. But can you imagine what was going on in their heads as they tried to process all that seemingly contradictory information - for it is not everyday that you meet someone who has come back from the dead. There was however, one disciple who was missing that evening and that was Thomas. Now I have always said that I think that so-called doubting Thomas gets a bad press. He certainly didn't have an open mind did he? However, I wonder how many of us would have reacted in a similar manner and want to see tangible proof with our own eyes? A week later Thomas had his chance to meet the risen Christ and was able to physically touch the nail marks in his hands and the hole in his side.

It was George Bernard Shaw who once said: 'Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything'. What Thomas and the other disciples saw totally transformed their thinking. They went on to be bold witnesses to the

resurrection and many of they died martyrs deaths as a consequence. We heard Peter's bold first hand witness account in our earlier reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Back to the Frank Zappa parachute analogy; a parachute only works when it is deployed and opened. Without a fully open chute a skydiver will rapidly plummet to his or her death. The same applies to our thinking. If you have a closed mind, can I encourage you to unfurl your metaphorical parachute and embrace new possibilities, new ways of thinking? Some of the world's greatest agents of changes have been those who have had open minds. For example, Albert Einstein who said: 'The measure of intelligence is the ability to change".

Jesus said to those first disciples who were first-hand witnesses of his resurrection: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe' (20:29) and the gospel writer John said: 'But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. I wonder are you willing to open your mind and embrace life in all its fullness?

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